A

SERMON

Preached before the

KING,

MARCH 13. 166⅚

BY

Edward Stillingfleet, B. D. Chaplain in Ordinary to his Majesty.

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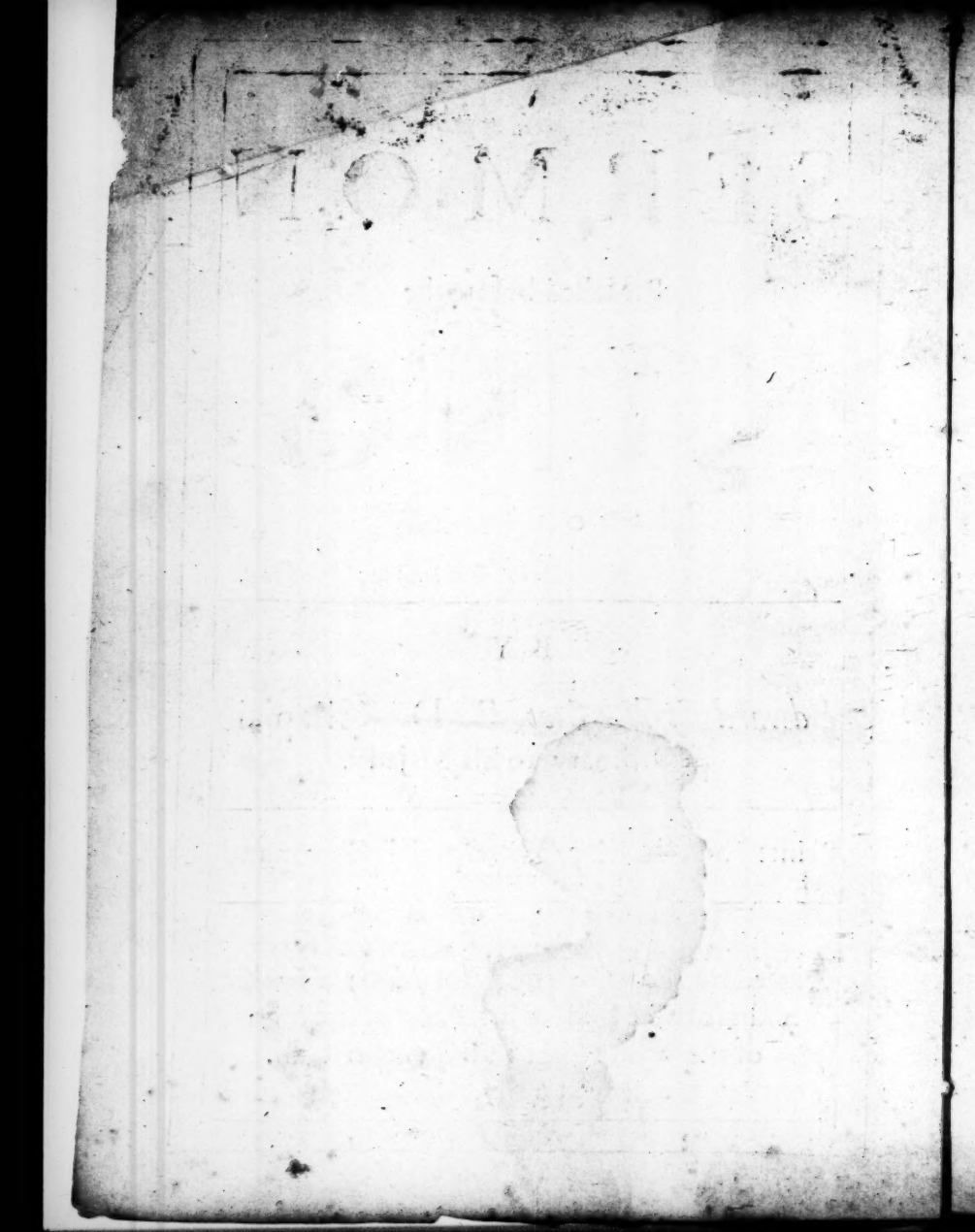

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PROVERBS 14. 9.

Fools make a mock at Sin.

WHEN *God* by his infinite Wiſdom had contrived, and by a power and goodneſs, as infinite as his Wiſdom, had perfected the creation of the viſible world, there ſeemed to be nothing wanting to the glory of it, but a creature endued with reaſon and underſtanding, which might comprehend the deſign of his wiſdom, enjoy the benefits of his goodneſs, and employ it ſelf in the celebration of his power. The Beings purely intellectuall were too highly raiſed by their own order and creation, to be the *Lords* of this inferiour world: and thoſe whoſe natures could reach no higher than the objects of ſenſe, were not

capable of discovering the glorious perfections of the great Creator: and therefore could not be the fit *Instruments* of his praise and service. But a conjunction of both these together was thought necessary to make up such a sort of beings, which might at once command this lower world, and be the servants of him who made it. Not as though this great fabrick of the world were meerly raised for man to please his fancy in the contemplation of it, or to exercise his dominion over the creatures designed for his use and service: but that by frequent reflections on the author of his being, and the effects of his power and goodness he might be brought to the greatest love and admiration of him. So that the most natural part of *Religion* lyes in the grateful acknowledgments we owe to that excellent and supream Being, who hath shewed so particular a kindness to man in the creation and Government of the world. Which was so great and unexpressible, that some have thought, it was not so much pride and affectation of a greater height, as envy at the felicity and power of mankind, which was the occasion of the fall of the *Apostate Spirits*. But whether or no the state of man were occasion enough for the

envy

envy of the *Spirits* above; we are ſure the kindneſs of Heaven was ſo great in it, as could not but lay an indiſpenſable obligation on all mankind to perpetual gratitude and obedience. For it is as eaſie to ſuppoſe, that affronts and injuries are the moſt ſuitable returns for the moſt obliging favours; that the firſt duty of a *Child* ſhould be to deſtroy his Parents; that to be thankful for kindneſſes received, were to commit the unpardonable ſin; as that man ſhould receive his being and all the bleſsings which attend it from *God*, and not be bound to the moſt univerſal obedience to him.

And as the reflection on the author of his being, leads him to the acknowledgement of his duty towards *God*, ſo the conſideration of the deſign of it, will more eaſily acquaint him with the nature of that duty which is expected from him. Had man been deſigned only to act a ſhort part here in the world, all that had been required of him, had been only to expreſs his thankfulneſs to *God* for his being, and the comforts of it: the uſing all means for the due preſervation of himſelf; the doing nothing beneath the dignity of humane nature, nothing injurious to thoſe who were of the ſame nature with himſelf; but

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since he is designed for greater and nobler ends; and his present state, is but a state of tryal, in order to future happiness and misery; the reason of good and evill is not to be taken meerly from his present, but from the respect, which things have to that eternall state he is designed for. From whence it follows, that the differences of good and evil are rooted in the nature of our beings, and are the necessary consequents of our relation to *God*, and each other, and our expectations of a future life. And therefore according to these measures, the estimation of men in the world hath been while they did preserve any veneration for *God* or *themselves*. Wisdom and folly was not measured so much by the subtilty and curiosity of mens speculations, by the fineness of their thoughts, or the depth of their designs, as by their endeavours to uphold the dignity of mankind; by their piety and devotion towards *God*; by their sobriety and due Government of their actions; by the equallity and justice, the charity and kindness of their dealings to one another. Wisdom was but another name for goodness, and folly for sin; then it was a mans glory to be religious; and to be profane and vitious, was to be base and mean: then there were no *Gods* wor-

worshipped because they were bad, nor any men disgraced because they were good. Then there were no *Temples* erected to the meanest passions of humane nature, nor men became *Idolaters* to their own infirmities. Then to be betrayed into sin, was accounted weakness; to contrive it, dishonour and baseness; to justifie and defend it, infamy and reproach; to make a mock at it, a marke of the highest folly and incorrigibleness. So the Wise man in the words of the Text assures us, that they are *Fools*, and those of the highest rank and degree of folly, *who make a mock at sin.*

It is well for us in the Age we live in, that we have the judgement of former ages to appeal to, and of those persons in them whose reputation for wisdom is yet unquestionable. For otherwise we might be born down by that spightful enemy to all vertue and goodness, the impudence of such, who it is hard to say whether they shew it more in commiting sin, or in defending it. Men whose manners are so bad, that scarce any thing can be imagined worse, unless it be the wit they use to excuse them with. Such who take the measure of mans perfections downwards, and the nearer they approach to beasts, the more they think themselves to act like men.

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men. No wonder then, if among ſuch as theſe the differences of good and evil be laughed at, and no ſin be thought ſo unpardonable, as the thinking that there is any at all. Nay the utmoſt they will allow in the deſcription of Sin, is, that it is a thing that ſome live by declaming againſt, and others cannot live without the practice of.

But is the *Chair* of *Scorners* at laſt proved the only chair of infalibility? Muſt thoſe be the ſtandard of mankind, who ſeem to have little left of humane nature, but laughter and the ſhape of men? Do they think that we are all become ſuch fools to take ſcoffs for arguments, and railery for demonſtrations? He knows nothing at all of goodneſs, that knows not that it is much more eaſie to laugh at it, than to practice it; and it were worth the while *to make a mock at ſin*, if the doing ſo would make nothing of it. But the nature of things does not vary with the humours of men; ſin becomes not at all the leſs dangerous becauſe men have ſo little Wit to think it ſo; nor *Religion* the leſs excellent and advantageous to the world, becauſe the greateſt enemies of that are ſo much to themſelves too, that they have learnt to deſpiſe it. But although that ſcorns to be defended by ſuch weapons

weapons whereby her enemies assault her, (nothing more unbecoming the *Majesty* of *Religion*, than to make it self cheap, by making others laugh) yet if they can but obtain so much of themselves to attend with patience to what is serious, there may be yet a possibility of perswading them, that no *fools* are so great as those who laugh themselves into misery, and none so certainly do so, as those *who make a mock at sin.*

But if our authority be too mean and contemptible to be relyed on, in a matter wherein they think us so much concern'd (and so I hope we are to prevent the ruine of mens souls) we dare with confidence appeal to the general sense of mankind in the matter of our present debate. Let them name but any one person in all the monuments of former ages, to whom but the bare suspicion of Vice was not a diminution to an esteem that might otherwise have been great in the world. And if the bare suspicion would do so much among even the more rude and barbarous Nations, what would open and professed wickedness do among the more knowing and civil? Humane nature retains an abhorrency of sin, so far that it is impossible for men to have the same esteem of those who are given over

to all manner of wickedneſs, though otherwiſe of great ſharpneſs of wit, and of ſuch whoſe natural abilities may not exceed the other, but yet do govern their actions according to the ſtrict rules of *Religion* and *Vertue*. And the general ſenſe of mankind cannot be by any thing better known, than by an univerſall conſent of men, as to the wayes whereby they expreſs their value and eſteem of others. What they all agree on as the beſt character of a perſon worthy to be loved and honoured, we may well think is the moſt agreeable to humane nature; and what is univerſally thought a diſparagement to the higheſt accompliſhments, ought to be looked on as the diſgrace and imperfection of it. Did ever any yet, though never ſo wicked and profane themſelves, ſeriouſly commend another perſon for his rudeneſs and debaucheries? Was any mans luſt and intemperance ever reckoned among the Titles of his honour? Who ever yet raiſed *Trophies* to his vices, or thought to perpetuate his memory by the glory of them? Where was it ever known, that ſobriety and temperance, juſtice and charity were thought the marks of reproach and infamy? Who ever ſuffered in their reputation by being thought to be really good? Nay, it is ſo far from

from it, that the moſt wicked perſons do inwardly eſteem them whether they will or no. By which we ſee, that even in this lapſed and degenerate condition of mankind, it is only goodneſs which gains true honour and eſteem, and nothing doth ſo effectually blaſt a growing reputation, as wickedneſs and vice.

But if it be thus with the generality of men, who were never yet thought to have too much partiality towards goodneſs, we may much more eaſily find it among thoſe, who have had a better ground for the reputation of their wiſdom, than the meer vogue of the people. He who was pronounced by the *Heathen Oracle*, to be the wiſeſt among the *Greeks*, was the perſon who brought down Philoſophy from the obſcure and uncertain ſpeculations of nature, and in all his diſcourſes recommended vertue as the trueſt wiſdom. And he among the *Jews*, whoſe *ſoul was as large as the ſand on the Sea ſhore, whoſe wiſdom outwent that of all the perſons of his own or future ages*, writes a Book on purpoſe to perſwade men, that there is no real wiſdom, but to fear God and keep his commandments: that ſin is the greateſt folly, and the meaner apprehenſions men have of it, the more they are infatuated by the temptations to it. But as 1 Kings 4.29,30, 31.

there are degrees of sinning, so there are of folly in it. Some sin with a blushing countenance, and a trembling conscience; they sin, but yet they are afraid to sin: they sin, but in the act of it they condemn themselves for what they do; they sin, but with confusion in their faces, with horror in their minds, and an earthquake in their consciences: though the condition of such persons be dangerous, and their unquietness shews the greatness of their folly, yet because these twitches of conscience argue there are some quick touches left of the sense of good and evil, their case is not desperate, nor their condition incurable: But there are others who despise these as the reproach of the *School* of *Wickedness*, because they are not yet attained to those heights of impiety which they glory in: such who have subdued their consciences much easier than others do their sins; who have almost worn out all the impressions of the *work of the Law written in their hearts*; who not only make a practice, but a boast of sin, and defend it with as much greediness as they commit it: these are the men, whose folly is manifest to all men but themselves; and surely since these are the men, whom *Solomon* in the words of the *Text* describes,

(1.) By their character, as *Fools*, and,
(2.) By the inſtance of their folly, *in making a mock at ſin*; We may have not only the liberty to uſe, but to prove, that name of reproach to be due unto them; and (2.) To ſhew the reaſonableneſs of faſtning it upon them, becauſe they *make a mock at ſin.*

But before I come more cloſely to purſue that, it will be neceſſary to conſider another ſenſe of theſe words cauſed by the ambiguity of the *Hebrew* Verb, which ſometimes ſignifies to deride and ſcorn, ſometimes to plead for, and excuſe a thing with all the arts of *Rhetorick* (thence the word for *Rhetorick* is derived from the verb here uſed) according to which ſenſe, it notes all the plauſible pretences and ſubtil extenuations which wicked men uſe in defence of their evil actions. For as if men intended to make ſome recompence for the folly they betray in the acts of ſin by the wit they employ in the pleading for them, there is nothing they ſhew more induſtry and care in, than in endeavouring to baffle their own conſciences, and pleaſe themſelves in their folly, till death and eternal flames awaken them. That we may not therefore ſeem to beg all wicked men for *Fools*, till we have heard what they have to ſay for themſelves, we

ſhall firſt examine the reaſonableneſs of their faireſt Plea's for their evil actions, before we make good the particular impeachment of *folly* againſt them. There are three wayes eſpecially whereby they ſeek to juſtifie themſelves; by laying the blame of all their evil actions, either upon the fatal neceſſity of all events, the unavoidable frailty of humane nature, or the impoſsibility of keeping the Laws of Heaven: But that none of theſe will ſerve to excuſe them from the juſt imputation of *folly*, is our preſent buſineſs to diſcover.

1. *The fatall neceſsity of all humane actions.* Thoſe who upon any other terms are unwilling enough to own either *God* or *Providence*, yet if they can but make theſe ſerve their turn to juſtifie their ſins by, their quarrell againſt them then ceaſeth, as being much more willing that *God* ſhould bear the blame of their ſins, than themſelves. But yet the very fears of a *Deity* ſuggeſt ſo many dreadful thoughts of his *Majeſty*, *Juſtice*, and *Power*, that they are very well contented to have him wholly left out, and then to ſuppoſe Man to be a meer Engine, that is neceſſarily moved by ſuch a train and ſeries of cauſes, that there is no action how bad ſoever that is done by him, which it was any more poſsible for him not to have done, than for the

the fire not to burn when it pleaſes. If this be true, farewell all the differences of good and evil in mens actions; farewell all expectations of future rewards and puniſhments; *Religion* becomes but a meer name, and righteouſneſs but an art to live by. But it is with this, as it is with the other arguments they uſe againſt *Religion*; there is ſomething within, which checks and controles them in what they ſay: and that inward remorſe of conſcience, which ſuch men ſometimes feel in their evil actions (when conſcience is forced to recoil by the foulneſs of them) doth effectually confute their own *hypotheſis*; and makes them not believe thoſe actions to be neceſſary, for which they ſuffer ſo much in themſelves becauſe they knew they did them freely. Or is it as fatal for man to believe himſelf free when he is not ſo, as it is for him to act when his choice is determined? but what *ſeries* of cauſes is there that doth ſo neceſſarily impoſe upon the common ſenſe of all mankind; It ſeems very ſtrange, that man ſhould have ſo little ſenſe of his own intereſt to be ſtill neceſsitated to the worſt of actions, and yet torment himſelf with the thoughts that he did them freely. Or is it only the *freedom of action*, and not of *choice*, that men have an experience of within

within themſelves? But ſurely, however men may ſubtilly diſpute of the difference between theſe two, no man would ever believe himſelf to be free in what he does, unleſs he firſt thought himſelf to be ſo, in what he determines? And if we ſuppoſe man to have as great a *freedom of choice* in all his evil actions (which is the liberty we are now ſpeaking of) as any perſons aſſert or contend for, we cannot ſuppoſe that he ſhould have a greater experience of it, than now he hath. So that either it is impoſsible for man to know when his choice is free; or if it may be known, the conſtant experience of all evil men in the world will teſtifie, that it is ſo now. Is it poſsible for the moſt intemperate perſon to believe, when the moſt pleaſing temptations to luſt or gluttony are preſented to him, that no conſiderations whatever could reſtrain his appetite, or keep him from the ſatisfaction of his brutiſh inclinations? Will not the ſudden, though groundleſs apprehenſion of poyſon in the Cup, make the Drunkards heart to ake, and hand to tremble, and to let fall the ſuppoſed fatal mixture in the midſt of all his jollity and exceſs; How often have perſons who have deſigned the greateſt miſchief to the lives and fortunes of others,

others, when all opportunities have fallen out beyond their expectation for accompliſhing their ends, through ſome ſudden thoughts which have ſurpriſed them, almoſt in the very act, been diverted from their intended purpoſes? Did ever any yet imagine that the charms of beauty and allurements of luſt were ſo irreſiſtible, that if men knew before hand they ſhould ſurely dye in the embraces of an adulterous bed, they could not yet withſtand the temptations to it? If then ſome conſiderations, which are quite of another nature from all the objects which are preſented to him, may quite hinder the force and efficacy of them upon the minde of man (as we ſee in *Joſephs* reſiſting the importunate Careſſes of his Miſtriſs) what reaſon can there be to imagine that man is a meer *machine* moved only as outward objects determine him? And if the conſiderations of preſent fear and danger may divert men from the practice of evill actions, ſhall not the far more weighty conſiderations of eternity have, at leaſt an equal, if not a far greater power and efficacy upon mens minds, to keep them from everlaſting miſery? Is an immortal ſoul and the eternal happineſs of it ſo mean a thing in our eſteem and value, that we will not deny our ſelves thoſe

ſenſual pleaſures for the ſake of that, which we would renounce for ſome preſent danger? Are the flames of another world ſuch painted fires, that they deſerve only to be laughed at, and not ſeriouſly conſidered by us? Fond man! art thou only free to ruine and deſtroy thy ſelf? a ſtrange fatality indeed, when nothing but what is mean and trivial ſhall determine thy choiſe! when matters of the higheſt moment are therefore leſs regarded, becauſe they are ſuch. Haſt thou no other plea for thy ſelf, but that thy ſins were fatal? thou haſt no reaſon then to believe but that thy miſery ſhall be ſo too. But if thou owneſt a *God* and *Providence*, aſſure thy ſelf that juſtice and righteouſneſs are not meer *Titles* of *his Honour*, but the real properties of his nature. And he who hath appointed the rewards and puniſhments of the great day, will then call the ſinner to account, not only for all his other ſins, but for offering to lay the imputation of them upon himſelf. For if the greateſt abhorrency of mens evil wayes, the rigour of his Laws, the ſeverity of his judgements, the exactneſs of his juſtice, the greateſt care uſed to reclaim men from their ſins, and the higheſt aſſurance, that he is not the cauſe of their ruine, may be any vindication of the holineſs of

God

God now, and his juſtice in the life to come; we have the greateſt reaſon to lay the blame of all our evil actions upon our ſelves, as to attribute the glory of all our good unto himſelf alone.

2. *The frailty of humane nature*: thoſe who find themſelves to be free enough to do their ſouls miſchief, and yet continue ſtill in the doing of it, finde nothing more ready to plead for themſelves, than the unhappineſs of mans compoſition, and the degenerate ſtate of the world. If *God* had deſigned (they are ready to ſay) that man ſhould lead a life free from ſin, why did he confine the ſoul of man to a body ſo apt to taint and pollute it? But who art thou O man, that thus findeſt fault with thy Maker? Was not his kindneſs the greater, in not only giving thee a ſoul capable of enjoying himſelf, but ſuch an habitation for it here, which by the curioſity of its contrivance, the number and uſefulneſs of its parts, might be a perpetual and domeſtick teſtimony of the wiſdom of its *Maker*? Was not ſuch a conjunction of ſoul and body neceſſary for the exerciſe of that dominion which *God* deſigned man for, over the creatures endued only with ſenſe and motion? and if we ſuppoſe this life to be a ſtate of triall in order to a better, (as in

all reaſon we ought to do) what can be imagined more proper to ſuch a ſtate, than to have the ſoul conſtantly employed in the government of thoſe ſenſual inclinations which ariſe from the body? in the doing of which, the proper exerciſe of that vertue conſiſts, which is made the condition of future happineſs. Had it not been for ſuch a compoſition, the difference could never have been ſeen between good and bad men; *i. e.* between thoſe who maintain the Empire of reaſon, aſſiſted by the motives of *Religion*, over all the inferiour faculties, and ſuch who dethrone their ſouls and make them ſlaves to every luſt that will command them. And if men willingly ſubject themſelves to that which they were born to rule, they have none to blame but themſelves for it. Neither is it any excuſe at all, that this, through the degeneracy of mankind, is grown the common cuſtom of the world; unleſs that be in it ſelf ſo great a Tyrant, that there is no reſiſting the power of it. If *God* had commanded us to comply with all the cuſtoms of the world, and at the ſame time to be *ſober, righteous, and good*, we muſt have lived in another age than we live in, to have excuſed theſe two commands from a palpable contradiction. But inſtead of this, he hath fore-

forewarned us of the danger of being led aſide by the ſoft, and eaſie compliances of the world; and if we are ſenſible of our own infirmities, (as we have all reaſon to be) he hath offered us the aſſiſtance of his *Grace* & of that *Spirit* of his, *which is greater than the Spirit that is in the world.* 1 Joh. 4. 4. He hath promiſed us thoſe weapons whereby we may withſtand the *torrent* of wickedneſs in the world, with far greater ſucceſs than the old *Gauls* were wont to do the inundations of their country, whoſe cuſtom was to be drowned with their arms in their hands. But it will be the greater folly in us to be ſo, becauſe we have not only ſufficient means of reſiſtance, but we underſtand the danger before hand. If we once forſake the ſtrict rules of Religion and goodneſs, and are ready to yield our ſelves to whatever hath got retainers enough to ſet up for a cuſtom, we may know where we begin, but we cannot where we ſhall make an end. For every freſh aſſault makes the breach wider, at which more enemies may come in ſtill; ſo that when we find our ſelves under their power, we are contented for our own eaſe to call them *Friends*. Which is the unhappy conſequence of too eaſie yielding at firſt, till at laſt the greateſt ſlavery to ſin be accounted but good humour, and a gentle compliance

with the fashions of the world. So that when men are perswaded, either through fear, or too great easiness to disuse that strict eye which they had before to their actions, it oft times falls out with them, as it did with the Souldier in the *Roman History*, who blinded his eye so long in the time of the Civil Wars, that when he would have used it again, he could not. And when custome hath by degrees taken away the sense of sin from their consciences, they grow as hard as *Heroditus* tells us the heads of the old *Egyptians* were by the heat of the Sun, that nothing would ever enter them. If men will with *Nebuchadnezzar* herd with the beasts of the field, no wonder if their reason departs from them, and by degrees they grow as savage as the company they keep. So powerful a thing is custom to debauch mankind, and so easily do the greatest vices by degrees obtain admission into the souls of men, under pretence of being retainers to the common *infirmities* of humane nature. Which is a *phrase*, through the power of self-flattery, and mens ignorance in the nature of moral actions, made to be of so large and comprehensive a sense that the most wilful violations of the *Laws* of Heaven, and such which the *Scripture* tells us do exclude from the *Kingdom* of it,

it, do find (rather than make) friends enough to ſhelter themſelves under the *protection* of them. But ſuch a *protection* it is, which is neither allowed in the *Court* of Heaven, nor will ever ſecure the ſouls of men without a hearty and ſincere repentance, from the *arreſt* of divine juſtice; which when it comes to call the world to an account of their actions will make no defalcations at all for the power of cuſtom, or common practice of the world.

3. *The impoſsibility of the command, or rather of obedience to it.* When neither of the former plea's will effect their deſign, but notwithſtanding the pretended *neceſsity of humane actions*, and the more than pretended *common practice of the world*, their conſciences ſtill fly in their faces and rebuke them ſharply for their ſins, then in a mighty rage and fury they charge *God* himſelf with *Tyranny* in laying impoſsible *Laws* upon the ſons of men. But if we either conſider the nature of the command, or the promiſes which accompany it, or the large experience of the world to the contrary, we ſhall eaſily diſcover that this pretence is altogether as unreaſonable as either of the foregoing. For what is it that *God* requires of men as the condition of their future happineſs which in its own nature is judged impoſsible?

poſsible? Is it for men to *live ſoberly, righteouſly*
Tit.2.12. *and godly in this world?* for that was the end of Chriſtian Religion to perſwade men to do ſo: but who thinks it impoſsible to avoid the occaſions of intemperance, not to defraud, or injure his neighbours, or to pay that reverence and ſincere devotion to *God* which we owe unto him? *Is it to do as we would be done by?* yet that hath been judged by ſtrangers to the *Chriſtian Religion* a moſt exact meaſure of humane converſation; Is it *to maintain an univerſal kindneſs and good will to men?* that indeed is the great excellency of our Religion, that it ſo ſtrictly requires it; but if this be impoſsible, farewell all *good nature* in the world; and I ſuppoſe few will own this charge, leſt theirs be ſuſpected. Is it *to be patient under ſufferings, moderate in our deſires, circumſpect in our actions, contented in all conditions?* yet theſe are things which thoſe have pretended to, who never owned *Chriſtianity*, and therefore ſurely they never thought them impoſsible. Is it *to be charitable to the poor, compaſsionate to thoſe in miſery?* is it *to be frequent in prayer, to love God above all things to forgive our enemies as we hope God will forgive us, to believe the Goſpel, and be ready to ſuffer for the ſake of Chriſt?* There are very few among us but will ſay they do all theſe things already,

dy, and therefore ſurely they do not think them impoſsible. The like anſwer I might give to all the other precepts of the *Goſpel* till we come to the *denying ungodlineſs and worldly luſts*, and as to theſe too, if we charge men with them, they either deny their committing them, and then ſay they have kept the command; or if they confeſs it, they promiſe amendment for the future; but in neither reſpect can they be ſaid to think the command impoſsible. Thus we ſee their own mouths will condemn them, when they charge *God* with laying impoſsible *Laws* on mankind. But then if we enquire further into the judgements of thoſe who it may be never concerned themſelves ſo much about the precepts of *Chriſtian Religion*, as to try whether they had any power to obſerve them or not; nay, if we yield them more (than, it may be, they are willing to enquire after, though they ought to do it) *viz.* that without the *aſsiſtance of divine grace*, they can never do it: yet ſuch is the unlimited nature of divine goodneſs and the exceeding riches of Gods Grace, that (knowing the weakneſs and degeneracy of humane nature when he gave theſe commands to men) he makes a large and free offer of aſsiſtance to all thoſe who are ſo ſenſible of their own infir-

mity as to beg it of him. And can men then ſay the command is impoſsible when he hath promiſed an aſsiſtance ſuitable to the nature of the duty and the infirmities of men? if it be acknowledged that ſome of the duties of *Chriſtianity* are very difficult to us now; let us conſider by what means he hath ſweetned the performance of them. Will not the propoſal of ſo excellent a reward, make us ſwallow ſome more than ordinary hardſhips that we might enjoy it? Hath he not made uſe of the moſt obliging motives to perſwade us to the practice of what he requires, by the infinite diſcovery of his own love, the death of his Son, and the promiſe of of his Spirit? And what then is wanting, but only ſetting our ſelves to the ſerious obedience of them, to make his commands not only not impoſsible, but eaſie to us? but our grand fault is, we make impoſsibilities our ſelves where we find none, and then we complain of them: we are firſt reſolved not to practice the commands, and then nothing more eaſie than to find fault with them: we firſt paſs ſentence, and then examine evidences; firſt condemn, and then enquire into the merits of the cauſe. Yet ſurely none of theſe things can be accounted impoſsible, which have been done by all thoſe who have been ſincere & hearty Chriſtians;

ans; & *God* forbid, we ſhould think all guilty of hypocriſie, who have profeſſed the *Chriſtian Religion* from the beginning of it to this day. Nay more than ſo, they have not only done them, but profeſſed to have that joy and ſatisfaction of mind in the doing of them, which they would not exchange for all the pleaſures & delights of the world. Theſe were the men, who not only were patient, but rejoyced in ſufferings; who accounted it their honour and glory to endure any thing for the ſake of ſo excellent a Religion; who were ſo aſſured of a future happineſs by it, that they valued Martyrdoms above Crowns and Scepters. But God be thanked, we may hope to come to Heaven on eaſier terms than theſe, or elſe many others might never come thither, beſides thoſe who think to make this a pretence for their ſin, that now when with encouragement and honour we may practice our Religion, the commands of it are thought impoſsible by them. Thus we have made good the general charge here implied againſt wicked men, in that they are called *Fools*, by examining the moſt plauſible pretences they bring for themſelves.

I now come to the particular impeachment of their folly, becauſe *they make a mock at ſin.* And that I ſhall prove eſpecially by two things:

1. Becauſe this argues *the higheſt degree of wickedneſs.* 2. Becauſe it betrayes the *greateſt weakneſs of judgement and want of conſideraiton.*

1. Becauſe it argues *the higheſt degree of wickedneſs.* If to ſin be folly, to make a mock at it is little ſhort of madneſs. It is ſuch a height of impiety, that few but thoſe who are of very profligate conſciences can attain to, without a long cuſtom in ſinning. For conſcience is at firſt modeſt, and ſtarts and boggles at the appearance of a great wickedneſs, till it be uſed to it and grown familiar with it. It is no ſuch eaſie matter for a man to get the maſtery of his conſcience; a great deal of force and violence muſt be uſed to ones ſelf before he does it. The natural impreſsions of good and evil, the fears of a *Deity*, and the apprehenſions of a future ſtate are ſuch curbs and checks in a ſinners way, that he muſt firſt ſin himſelf beyond all feeling of theſe, before he can attain to the *ſeat* of the *ſcorners*. And we may juſtly wonder how any ſhould ever come thither, when they muſt break through all that is ingenuous and modeſt, all that is vertuous and good, all that is tender and apprehenſive in humane nature, before they can arrive at it. They muſt firſt deny a *God*, and deſpiſe an immortal ſoul, they muſt conquer their own reaſon, and cancell the

Law

Law written in their hearts, they must hate all that is serious, and yet soberly believe themselves to be no better *than the beasts that perish*, before men can come to make a *scoff at religion, and a mock at sin.*

And who now could ever imagine that in a Nation professing *Christianity*, among a people whose *genius* enclines them to civility & religion, yea among those who have the greatest advantages of behaviour and education, and who are to give the *Laws* of *civility* to the rest of the Nation, there should any be found who should deride religion, make sport with their own profaneness, and make so light of nothing, as being damned? I come not here to accuse any, and least of all those who shew so much regard of *religion* as to be present in the places devoted to sacred purposes; but if there be any such here, whose consciences accuse themselves, for any degrees of so great impiety; I beseech them by all that is dear and precious to them, by all that is sacred and serious, by the *vows* of their *Baptism*, and their *participation* of the *Holy Eucharist*, by all the kindness of Heaven which they either enjoy or hope for, by the death and sufferings of the *Son* of *God*, that they would now consider how great folly and wicked-

wickedness they betray in it, and what the dreadful consequence of it will be, if they do not timely repent of it. If it were a doubt (as I hope it is not among any here) whether the matters of *Religion* be true or no, they are surely things which ought to be seriously thought and spoken of. It is certainly no jesting matter to affront a *God* of infinite *Majesty* and *Power*, (and he judges every wilfull sinner to do so) nor can any one in his wits think it a thing not to be regarded, whether he be eternally happy or miserable. Methinks then among persons of civility and honour, above all others, *Religion* might at least be treated with the respect & reverence due to the concernments of it; that it be not made the sport of Entertainments, nor the common subject of *Playes* and *Comedies*. For is there nothing to trifle with, but *God* and his *service*? Is wit grown so *schismatical* and *sacrilegious*, that it can please it self with nothing but *holy ground*? Are profaness and wit grown such inseparable companions, that none shall be allowed to pretend to the one, but such as dare be highly guilty of the other? Far be it form those who have but the name of *Christians*, either to do these things themselves, or to be pleased with them that do them: especially in such times as ours of late have been, when *God* hath used

uſed ſo many wayes to make us ſerious if any thing would ever do it. If men had only ſlighted *God* and *Religion*, and *made a mock at ſin*, when they had grown wanton through the abundance of peace and plenty, and ſaw no ſeverities of *Gods juſtice* uſed upon ſuch who did it; yet the fault had been ſo great, as might have done enough to have interrupted their peace and deſtroyed that *plenty*, which made them out of the greatneſs of their pride and wantonneſs to kick againſt Heaven: but to do it in deſpight of all *Gods* judgements, to *laugh in his face* when *his rod is upon our backs*; when neither Peſtilence nor Fire can make us more afraid of him, exceedingly aggravates the impiety, and makes it more unpardonable. When like the old *Germans we dance among naked ſwords*, when men ſhall defie and reproach Heaven in the midſt of a Cities ruines, and over the Graves of thoſe whom the arrows of the *Almighty* have heaped together, what can be thought of ſuch, but that nothing will make them ſerious, but eternal miſery? And are they ſo ſure there is no ſuch thing to be feared, that they never think of it, but when by their execrable oaths they call upon *God to damn them*, for fear he ſhould not do it time enough for them? Thus while men abuſe his patience, and provoke his juſtice,

while

while they trample upon his kindneſs, and ſlight his ſeverities, while they deſpiſe his Laws and mock at the breaches of them, what can be added more to their impiety? or what can be expected by ſuch who are guilty of it, but that *God* ſhould quickly diſcover their mighty folly by letting them ſee how much they have deceived themſelves, ſince
Gal.6.7. *God will not be mocked,* but *becauſe of theſe things*
Eph.5.6. *the wrath of God will moſt certainly come upon the children of diſobedience.* Which leads to the ſecond thing wherein this folly is ſeen.

2. Which is in *the weakneſs of judgement and want of conſideration*, which this betrayes in men. *Folly* is the great unſteadineſs of the mind in the thoughts of what is good and fitting to be done. It were happy for many in the world, if none ſhould ſuffer in their reputation for want of wiſdom, but ſuch whom nature or ſome violent diſtemper have wholly deprived of the uſe of their reaſon and underſtandings: But wiſdom does not lye in the rambling imaginations of mens minds (for *fools* may think of the ſame things which wiſe men practice) but in a due conſideration and choice of things which are moſt agreeable to the end they deſign, ſuppoſing the end in the firſt place to be worthy a wiſe mans choice; for I cannot yet

yet ſee why the end may not be choſen as well as the means, when there are many ſtand in competition for our choice, and men firſt deliberate, and then determine which is the fitteſt to be purſued. But when the actions of men diſcover, that either they underſtand or regard not the moſt excellent end of their beings, or do thoſe things which directly croſs and thwart their own deſigns, or elſe purſue thoſe which are mean and ignoble in themſelves, we need not any further evidence of their folly, than theſe things diſcover.

Now that thoſe who *make a mock at ſin* are guilty of all theſe, will appear; if we conſider whom they provoke by doing ſo, whom they moſt injure, and upon what reaſonable conſiderations they are moved to what they do.

1. *Whom they provoke by their making a mock at ſin*; Suppoſing that there is a *Governour* of the world, who hath eſtabliſhed *Laws* for us to be guided by, we may eaſily underſtand, whoſe honour and authority is reflected on, when the violations of his *Laws* are made nothing of. For ſurely if they had a juſt eſteem of his *power* and *Soveraignty*, they never durſt make ſo bold with him, as all thoſe do who not only commit ſin themſelves, but laugh at the ſcrupuloſity of thoſe who dare not. When

Dionysius changed *Apollos* Cloak, and took off the *Golden Beard* of *Æsculapius*, with those solemn jeers of the unsuitableness of the one to the Son of a beardless Father; and the much greater conveniency of a cheaper garment to the other; it was a sign he stood not much in awe of the severity of their looks, nor had any dread at all of the greatness of their power. But although there be so infinite a disproportion between the artificial *Deities* of the *Heathens*, and the *Majesty* of him who made and governs the whole world; yet as little reverence to his power and authority is shewed by all such who dare affront him with such a mighty confidence, and bid the greatest defiance to his *Laws* by scoffing at them. What is there, the *Soveraigns* and *Princes* of the earth do more justly resent, and express the highest indignation against, than to have their *Laws* despised, their persons affronted, and their authority contemned? And can we then imagine, that a *God* of infinite *power* and *Majesty*, the honour of whose *Laws* is as dear to him as his own is, should sit still unconcerned, when so many indignities are continually offered them, and never take any notice at all of them? It is true, his patience is not to be measured by our fretfull and peevish natures, (and it is happy

happy for us all that it is not) he knows the ſinner can never eſcape his power, and therefore bears the longer with him: but yet his lenity is alwayes joyned with his wiſdom and juſtice, and the time is coming when patience it ſelf ſhall be no more. Is it not then the higheſt madneſs and folly to provoke one whoſe power is infinitely greater than our own is, and from the ſeverity of whoſe wrath we cannot ſecure our ſelves one minute of an hour? How knoweſt thou, O vain man, but that in the midſt of all thy mirth and jollity, while thou art boaſting of thy ſins, and thinkeſt thou canſt never fill up faſt enough the meaſure of thy iniquities, a ſudden fit of an *Apoplexy*, or the breaking of an *Apoſteme*, or any of the innumerable inſtruments of death, may diſpatch thee hence, and conſign thee into the hands of divine juſtice? And wherewithall then wilt thou be able to diſpute with *God*? Wilt thou then charge his Providence with folly, and his Laws with unreaſonableneſs? when his greatneſs ſhall affright thee, his *Majeſty* aſtoniſh thee, his *power* diſarm thee, and his juſtice proceed againſt thee: when notwithſtanding all thy *bravado's* here, thy own conſcience ſhall be not only thy accuſer and witneſs, but thy judge and executioner too: when it ſhall

revenge it ſelf upon thee for all the rapes and violences thou haſt committed upon it here: when horror and confuſion ſhall be thy portion, and the unſpeakable anguiſh of a racked and tormented mind ſhall too late convince thee of thy folly in *making a mock* at that which ſtings with an everlaſting venom. Art thou then reſolved to put all theſe things to the adventure, and live as ſecurely as if the *terrors* of the *Almighty* were but the dreams of men awake, or the fancies of weak and diſtempered brains? But I had rather believe that in the heat and fury of thy luſts thou wouldſt ſeem to others to think ſo, than thou either doeſt or canſt perſwade thy ſelf to ſuch unreaſonable folly. Is it not then far better to conſult the tranquility of thy mind here, and the eternal happineſs of it hereafter, by a ſerious repentance and ſpeedy amendment of thy life, than to expoſe thy ſelf for the ſake of thy ſenſual pleaſures to the fury of that *God* whoſe juſtice is infinite, and power irreſiſtible? Shall not *the apprehenſion of his excellency make thee* now *afraid of him?* Never then *make* any *mock at ſin* more, unleſs thou art able *to contend with the Almighty*, or *to dwell with everlaſting burnings.*

2. The folly of it is ſeen in conſidering *whom the*

the injury redounds to by mens making themſelves ſo pleaſant with their ſins. Do they think by their rude attempts to dethrone the *Majeſty* of Heaven, or by ſtanding at the greateſt defiance, to make him willing to come to terms of compoſition with them? Do they hope to ſlip beyond the bounds of his power, by falling into nothing when they dye, or to ſue out *prohibitions* in the Court of Heaven, to hinder the effects of *Juſtice* there? Do they deſign to outwit infinite Wiſdom, or to find ſuch flaws in *Gods* government of the world, that he ſhall be contented to let them go unpuniſhed? All which imaginations are alike vain and fooliſh, & only ſhew how eaſily wickedneſs baffles the reaſon of mankind, & makes them rather hope or wiſh for the moſt impoſsible things, than believe they ſhall ever be puniſhed for their impieties. If the *Apoſtate Spirits* can by reaſon of their preſent reſtraint and expectation of future puniſhments be as pleaſant in beholding the *follies* of men as they are malicious to ſuggeſt them, it may be one of the greateſt diverſions of their miſery, to ſee how active and witty men are in contriving their own ruine. To ſee with what greedineſs they catch at every bait that is offered them, and when they are ſwallowing the moſt deadly *poyſon*, what arts

they uſe to perſwade themſelves that it is a healthfull potion. No doubt, nothing can more gratifie them than to ſee men ſport themſelves into their own deſtruction, & go down ſo pleaſantly to Hell: when eternal flames become the firſt awakeners, & then men begin to be wiſe, when it is too late to be ſo: when nothing but inſupportable torments can convince them that *God* was in earneſt with them, that he would not alwayes bear the affronts of evil men, and that thoſe who derided the miſeries of another life, ſhall have leiſure enough to repent their folly, when their repentance ſhall only increaſe their ſorrow without hopes of pardon by it.

3. But if there were any preſent felicity, or any conſiderable advantage to be gained by this *mocking at ſin*, and undervaluing Religion, there would ſeem to be ſome kind of pretence, though nothing of true reaſon for it. Yet that which heightens this folly to the higheſt degree in the laſt place is, that there can be no imaginable conſideration thought on which might look like a *plauſible temptation* to it. The covetous man, when he hath defrauded his neighbour, and uſed all kinds of arts to compaſs an eſtate, hath the fulneſs of his baggs to anſwer for him; and whatever they may do

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in another world, he is ſure they will do much in this. The voluptuous man, hath the ſtrong propenſities of his nature, the force of temptation which lies in the charms of beauty, to excuſe his unlawfull pleaſures by. The ambitious man, hath the greatneſs of his mind, the advantage of authority, the examples of thoſe who have been great before him, and the envy of thoſe who condemn him, to plead for the heights he aims at. But what is it which the perſon who deſpiſes Religion, and laughs at every thing that is ſerious, propoſes to himſelf as the reaſon of what he does? But alas! this were to ſuppoſe him to be much more ſerious than he is, if he did propound any thing to himſelf as the ground of his actions. But it may be a great kindneſs to others, though none to himſelf; I cannot imagine any, unleſs it may be, to make them thankfull they are not arrived to that height of folly; or out of perfect good nature, leſt they ſhould take him to be wiſer than he is. The *Pſalmiſts fool* deſpiſes him as much as he does Religion: for he only *ſaith it in his heart there is no God*; but this though he dares not think there is none, yet ſhews him not near ſo much outward reſpect and reverence as the other does. Even the *Atheiſt* himſelf thinks him a *Fool*, and the greateſt of

of all other, who believes a *God*, and yet affronts him and trifles with him. And although the *Atheist's Folly* be unaccountable, in reſiſting the cleareſt evidence of reaſon, yet ſo far he is to be commended for what he ſayes, that if there be ſuch a thing as *Religion*, men ought to be ſerious in it. So that of all hands the *ſcoffer at Religion* is looked on as one forſaken of that little reaſon, which might ſerve to uphold a ſlender reputation of being above *the beaſts that periſh*: nay, therein his condition is worſe than theirs, that as they underſtand not *Religion*, they ſhall never be puniſhed for deſpiſing it: which ſuch a perſon can never ſecure himſelf from, conſidering the *power*, the *juſtice*, the *ſeverity* of that *God*, whom he hath ſo highly provoked. *God* grant, that the appehenſion of this danger may make us ſo ſerious in the profeſsion & practice of our Religion, that we may not by ſlighting that, and *mocking at ſin*, provoke him *to laugh at our calamities, and mock when our fear comes*; but that by beholding the ſincerity of our repentance, and the heartineſs of our devotion to him, he may *turn his anger away from us, and rejoyce over us to do us good.*

FINIS.